A Land-Lover and His Land

By

Martha McCulloch Williams

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A Land-Lover and His Land

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E. W. Wells

New York

December 1909

A LAND-LOVER AND HIS LAND

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FROM THE NEW YORK AND REDFORD ROAD
A FAMILY PROCESSION
DOROTHY SELLS IN FRONT—
AUTO DISTANCED

A LAND-LOVER AND HIS LAND

BY

MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS

AUTHOR OF "NEXT TO THE GROUND," "FIELD FARINGS," "THE PIANNER MARES" "AN ADDED STARTER," ETC.

"*A great, broad province of green furrow and plowed furrow, between the old house and the city of the world.*"

—JEFFERIES

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A LAND-LOVER AND HIS LAND

THE WAKING FARM

FOREWORD

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THE WAKING FARM

TO battle with the dimming stars
Light-lances leap along the hills;
Safe in a tree beside the bars
A robin, waking, cheerily trills.
Not yet the sun, not yet the stir—
Gray dew lies lucent on the grass;
And huddled weanlings drowsing chir-r,
As stealthy vagrant footfalls pass.

YET roses white, and roses red,
Flash star-wise out from green-wreathed gloom,
And vines, in tendriled curtains spread,
Are 'broidered all with purple bloom.
Alike the low leaf and the high
Dance merrily in ruffling air,
And one lone lily breathes her sigh
Of incense, like a nun at prayer.

IN wafts the earth-scent, fine and faint,
And, subtle as a maiden's mind,
Rises to make us know the plaint
Of Eve—with Eden left behind.
But hark the hoof-beats! Down the mead,
A frolic foal, in plunging run,
Neighs to his dam with lifted head,
And bids her greet the rising sun.

FOREWORD

THE farm's reason of being you will find further on. The book's reason of being,—that is another, quite another guitar. Because, in matter meant for the public eye, it is impossible to tell the whole truth. Don't be frightened ladies—this deponent is no reformer. Instead, one of the unregenerate,—but that is neither here in the foreword, nor there, at the farm. The farm is a very wonderful place, full of flowers and fruit, and all delights; but you can't say in cold print to a callous public that its finest flower is kindliness, its finest fruit, rare good deeds.

But you, the elect who are to receive this vagrant record, must hear, mark and inwardly digest that such is the fact. Witness this: I, who had no other claim than lonely grief—I was no more than a friend to the farm-people's kinsfolk—was carried there, made royally welcome, and comforted with the good green things that are my dearest delight. Not once,

but over and over. Naturally, the place has grown on me, until I love it hardly less than its pastors and masters. I have been made free of it,—to range the field-sides, roam the woods, even let know, on the side as it were, that if I hooked a trout surreptitiously nobody would look very cross. I am even permitted to catch teeny, weeny chicks. A stretch of grace that, —which would, I fear, be beyond me, were the chicks my very own.

There is but one thing better than the farm proper—namely, the indwelling soul and spirit of it. There is no over-doing,—everything indeed hits the Irishman's "middle extreme," the fine line betwixt too much and not enough. This spirit runs from least to greatest, from the big boss, Mr. Elijah W. Sells himself, through Dorothy, she-who-must-be-obeyed, pet Marjorie, who ought to be "fed on the roses, and laid in the lilies of life," Patricia Salome, the dachshund, who beheads little chickens instead of John the Baptist, to Mrs. Mabel Sells—the elect lady by whose good leave I, too, catch chickens.

STONE WALL, SWEET WILLIAMS,
AND ANOTHER WILLIAMS

CANTERBURY BELLS A-RINGING

You see the reflex of this kindliness in all the farm people. Such pampered, petted beasts as live here ought to be happy enough to die. After seeing how they are pampered and petted, my greatest regret is that I did not know enough to be born a creature with such owners. But if these divagations keep up, I shall never get anywhere in my story. It meant to be the primest proper story, of how some excellent good bi-plane people — they have wings for city and country—rescued a waif from the red scathe and racket of a New York Fourth of July, and bore her off where even the neighbors' firecrackers ceased from troubling, and the weary sat up and took notice that they might weary of rest.

Rather that they might have wearied elsewhere—at the farm that is impossible. Because you can choose there the full sweetness of doing nothing, or put the little busy bee so out of conceit with itself it feels suicidal. Such lots to do, to see, to say, to eat. Wilt ride?—here are horses. Wilt walk?—here are woods. Berries in varieties for stealing—flowers to pluck

or let alone. A cushiony swing, an enchanted auto—it might run over mere folks but stops dead for a chicken—lashins to eat, what you will to drink—in short a combination—Delmonico's plus the Garden of Eden—and then some.

Naturally, I was loath to let in the outside world on anything so gorgeous. But being in literature—for revenue only—and having hypnotized sundry editor-folk into a belief that I can put outdoors on paper, I said "Here I write. Not everything, of course—but just the staid, proper things that will not tread on the corns of anybody's modesty." Result, what follows these few incongruous remarks. The Sells family are as generous as they are kind, so didn't mind my making it known that they had a corner on Paradise.

Jesting aside, I am very, very happy, if what I wrote shall be the means of returning to them, in even the smallest measure, the pleasure they have given me. In writing thus colloquially, with the privileged impertinence which knows its jest will be well taken, I have tried to say

more between the lines than in them. Almost a stranger, they took me in; desolate, broken in health and spirit, they welcomed me as one of their own. It is with joy, indeed, that I sign myself, still their friend's friend, and also

Their Own Friend,

MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS

A LAND-LOVER AND HIS LAND

THE FARMHOUSE
A STUDY IN EVOLUTION
ALSO AN EXAMPLE OF THE VIRTUES
OF OMISSION

UNDERSTAND, this is the story of an actual farm, not a "gentleman's country place;" and, though it lies ten miles from a railway station, no less a lemon, the owner and active head of it is likewise head of a business international in scope, with main offices on Broad Street, New York City. The business, public accounting, demands, imperatively, far-sighted, clear judgment and intense concentration of mind—things well nigh impossible unless the mind has the backing of a sound body. To maintain this saving bodily soundness in the days before the farm, the farmer man spent half his leisure on horseback. That was a bit costly, withal tiresome. One wearies of the finest bridle-path or parkway if one

sees it half the days in the year. Hence it appears the farm began in a horse's legs, supplemented by horse-sense, and something of natural inclination.

In the seven years since that beginning, a ragged run-down farm in northern Westchester county has been wholly transformed. It was bought cheap, considering its location, within thirty-five miles of the city, but to the farming eye it was dear at any price—a mere spread of marsh and rocks, interspersed with lean small fields, and starveling mowing lots, inclosed by toppling stone walls or unkempt wire fences. There was scarcely an outbuilding worthy the name. The house, though staunchly built, was cramped; moreover, upon its outer parts the scroll-saw had done its worst. Still, the

HORSE AND AWAY!
THE LAND-LOVER IS ALSO A HORSE-LOVER

place had the redemption of orchard trees, old and young, the comfort of living water — four fine springs — and the crowning mercy of fringing woodland, so wild, so fern-filled, it was a benediction.

The transformation has been gradual, and, to a degree, unintentional. At first, the new owner thought of nothing beyond a place to keep his horses in comfort, raise feed for them, and shelter himself over week-ends, or upon such nights as he was able to run up, and gallop back and forth to the trains. But he found country living a habit that grew upon him. It likewise grew upon his family. Especially after his wife fell ill,—so desperately ill the foremost doctors gave her absolutely no hope,—she pined for quiet, and the comfort of green things. The farm

gave her both—and something more. Today, after years in bed and in a wheel-chair, she is the happy, busy, house-mistress,—able to walk about the fields, joying to work in the dirt with her own hands, and almost abject in devotion to her poultry-yard and her pigs.

Both are mighty important in farm economy. The one hard and fast rule is that this farm must feed itself. There are exceptions, of course, in favor of groceries, butcher's meat and wheat flour. It has its own rye flour and corn meal, as well as hams, bacon, fowls of every sort, and fruits and vegetables in profusion. There are fresh eggs the year round, true gilt-edge butter, Jersey cream, milk and buttermilk. Nothing is ever sold; any surplus is given away. The marvel is that

MORNING INSPECTION
UNDRESS PARADE
THE LAND-LOVER VIEWING HIS PETS

there should ever be a surplus. Besides the family and guests, there are hired men to feed, also house-servants,—to say nothing of the fowls and pigs, the dairy herd, the yoke of oxen, and the horses, mules and colts.

The farmer, albeit not even a millionaire, prefers that insubstantial increment, the joys of rest and of living. Yet there is a substantial side to it. He has bought more land, bits here and there, until his holding is above two hundred and fifty acres. With the incursion of summer residents, and the consequent rise in real estate, he could sell, and not merely save himself whole, but have a very handsome profit. Against the expenses of maintenance there are offsets, very considerable ones. In the days before the farm, necessary horseback exercise

cost him about three thousand dollars a year; and, further, the expense of a summer cottage by the seashore, or in the mountains, was always around five thousand. Now the family do not care for summer cottages. Even from automobile tours, they are eager to get back to the farm. It is home; the city apartment, maintained all the year round, is only an abiding place. They are striking root in the soil, and thriving accordingly. Doctors' bills, once very considerable, have shrunk almost out of sight.

Of the original buildings, only a ramshackle barn and the shell of the farmhouse remain. The house, shorn of its scrolls, newly roofed and painted, furnished with open plumbing, and supplemented with porches, a piazza, and various additions, fits so well into

THE TENNIS COURT
SACRED TO LOW-BALLS, HIGH-BALLS, AND OTHER BALLS
SCORE, LOVE-ALL

its environment it would be a pity to supplant it even with something better. It is livable the year round, notwithstanding the rigors of the hill country. In the cellar there is a furnace big enough to rout arctic weather, even though it burns nothing but wood from the home forest. Windfalls and the tops of timber trees, supply fuel in abundance. The farmer has a knack of architecture, and joys to do farm building by day's work, from his own plans. It also pleases him to cut logs in his own woods, ox-haul them to mill, and fetch them back in lumber sawn to order. In fact, he keeps a lumber-pile always in reserve, and seasoning. He keeps also a fairly complete carpenter's shop, a forge, and blacksmith's tools. Indeed, it is a liberal education in providence

and contrivance, to see his barns, his bins, his dairy, his cellar, his smoke-house, his well-house. After seeing, you feel sure that, if he had not turned out a great accountant, he would have been a sort of Edison for domestic convenience.

By the well-house and water-supply hangs a story, short but instructive. There was a well in commission, good but insufficient. As has been said, there were also springs. The boldest of them came out in the woods half a mile away. So an engineer came and made plans for delivering its waters at the house by means of an hydraulic ram. The cost? Oh, a trifle—eight thousand dollars; moreover, the ram would run itself. The farmer said nothing—he was thinking deeply. A little way off the house was another

PIGS NOT IN CLOVER,
BUT IN PIG PARADISE
UNSHADOWED BY KNOWLEDGE THAT THE END
OF PIG IS BACON

spring, — sluggish, to be sure, but making marsh of some good land. He had the water analyzed; it turned out free of contamination. Next he dug down to bedrock, struck a bolder stream there, controlled it by pumping out, while a cemented wall was built to a little above earth level, set a tight, small house above the walled spring, laid pipes from it, put in a windmill, and two tanks, one outside, one in the attic, and found he had abundant water for everything — at a cost of less than one thousand dollars.

Marsh land has been underdrained, not with tile but native stone; thus there is double betterment, — every stone out of the way means a bit more of arable land. Stone walls, stout and trig, are making haste slowly to inclose the farm. The farm hands have laid

the most part of them, as farm-bred oxen have hauled the stones. Little fertilizer has been bought; but what with green crops, and the saving of barnyard manure, ploughland and meadows alike come yearly into better heart. One season, by special cultivation and heavy fertilizing, there was corn so rank and tall and heavy-eared it was the talk of the countryside. Muck in quantity has helped to redeem the garden from thirst and bareness. This has meant work, of course, which, in turn, has meant money; but could money be spent for more excellent, more saving work?

For a time, horses—horses for riding, driving, what not—sufficed. But in the end came the automobile. It is a big touring-car, strictly a farm belonging. It fetches the farm folk to town,

THE TROUT POND
WHERE ONE MAY RECALL IZAAK WALTON'S CAUTION
AS TO THE BAIT-MINNOW
"USE THEM AS THOUGH YOU LOVED THEM"

or to the trains, and takes them back again; but is rarely kept in the city, even overnight.

The chauffeur, a trained mechanic, makes most of the repairs. Thanks to his care and skill, they are never tedious. He stands, in authority, next to the farmer himself; so his wages can not be charged wholly to the car-account. It is about one thousand dollars yearly; throughout the winter months the machine is rarely used. The garage stands well away from other buildings, thereby minimizing danger of fire or explosion.

Inevitably, there is a tennis court—a notably excellent one, earth-floored, and walled with netting to a height the wildest volleying does not overpass. It neighbors the formal garden, where foxgloves and Canterbury bells,

clove pinks and gillyflowers, nod you a stately welcome, or ruffle contempt one of another. But you forget their high ways, their formal prettiness, when you fall under spell of the woods. They run to above a hundred acres, are full of rocky ledges, long gray mossy boulders, and the greenest shade. Brake-ferns stand waist-high; maiden-hair in thick tufts rises to the knee; sword-fern, lace-fern, staghorn-fern, and many others, spring rank on rank from black earth, whose richness is further attested by the tall white spires of cohosh, known otherwise as rattle-snake-weed. Two brooks thread the wood, murmuring or tinkling over big stones. Along them, in spring, there are sheaves of purple iris; in the height of high summer, other sheaves of cardinal-flower, scarlet as sin, and

A GREEN SILENCE
LIT WITH CARDINAL-FLOWER FLAME OR
THE PURPLE OF IRIS

prouder than pride; other flowers in quantity,—white, pink, purple, yellow, vari-colored, too many to name. With fair luck, you may surprise a squirrel; but only a rare chance brings you upon a partridge—a mother bird, with her brood, who, after vain lurings of calls and fluttering wings, walks boldly into sight, ruff up, wings drooping, crying aloud to her peeping, scattered brood. She makes you half forget that your destination is the trout pond, made by damming the brooks after they have joined. Trout are plenty in it,—you see them leap and dart all over the silver face of the pond. But they are too newly planted as yet for catching; other years, there will be another story.

This story has no moral, beyond the fact of verity. North Castle Farm is underdrawn rather than overdrawn.

The owner of it regards it as his most profitable investment, — this financially, no less than spiritually. In the deep peace of its winter evenings, he has thought out straight things otherwise very puzzling. He has also thought out things of use and value to himself primarily, but of more use and value to the world at large. His farm and his farming, instead of causing him to lose time from business, save it, by enabling him to do, in one business hour, the work of two. Should encroaching trolleys and apartment houses ever drive him from North Castle, it is safe to say he will find a farm in regions more remote.

His example is beyond the mass; still, there are business men, in thousands, who might follow it. Plenty of them pine to do it, yet are deterred by

BRIDGE ACROSS THE RAGING TORRENT—
TWO INCHES DEEP

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not knowing how. Let all such take heart of grace. In these days of autocars, open plumbing, and outdoor literature, all things are possible to him who dares. Country-living is most problematic when looked at in perspective. Good judgment and human kindness will resolve all its difficulties —even the servant problem No sort of life is all beer and skittles; the serpent Care lurks in every paradise. But, while the good green earth so invites to her help and healing, it is piteous that so many turn to her ears without hearing.

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